

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### AMERICAN WORKERS

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, this spring, I was talking with a grocery store worker in Ohio, who told me: "They call me essential, but I feel expendable." That grocery store worker and thousands of others who are on the frontlines of this pandemic risk their lives so that Americans can keep food on their tables and get their packages delivered. They change linen in hospitals. They drive city buses or rural buses. They stock shelves in supermarkets.

When these workers go home at night, having been exposed to the public pretty much their whole workday, they worry they are going to bring the virus home and infect their families.

It is essential workers keeping our society going. A number of American corporations claim to recognize this. They have run feel-good ads—at least they did early in the pandemic—saying "thank you" to essential workers, claiming these workers are the heart of their companies.

But saying "thank you" is not nearly enough. Workers don't need a PR campaign. They need fair pay and protections on the job. These corporations get positive press off their workers while too often paying them poverty wages and, in too many cases, failing to protect their safety in the workplace.

I wrote an open letter this summer to corporate executives, published in their paper of record, the Wall Street Journal. I said to these corporations: You say your workers are essential. Then treat them that way. Our economy is supposed to reward people whose talents are in high demand. That is what we are all taught. That is what you always tell us; right? These workers' skills keep our economy going. Their paychecks should reflect that.

It has been 6 months since that letter was published. It may surprise no one to learn that my phone has not been ringing off the hook with calls from CEOs who want to discuss renewed efforts to invest in their workers.

All that has changed is that corporate profits have gone up, hazard pay has disappeared, and more workers have died. Profits are up at most of the biggest companies, especially the large retail companies.

The Brookings Institution studied the 13 biggest retailers in this country and found that their earnings have shot up 39 percent compared with last year, and stock prices are up 33 percent. Guess how much wages have gone up. One dollar an hour.

The Washington Post looked at the 50 biggest corporations. Between April and September, these companies handed out more than \$240 billion—240,000 million, \$240 billion—to their stockholders through stock buybacks and dividends.

It is workers making these companies successful. It is workers risking their lives on the job, but shareholders got nearly 8 percent of the profits workers created.

Look at Amazon. The company's quarterly profits increased by a staggering 200 percent. But that same Amazon rolled back its tiny \$2-an-hour raise in June and announced a bonus of just \$300 per worker. You heard that correctly—not \$3,000 but \$300, from a company that brought in \$280 billion in revenue last year.

If even a global pandemic, where American workers have been on the frontlines—if even that—will not get corporations to rethink their business model that treats workers as expendable, then, frankly, it is time—and my colleagues should hear this—to stop letting them run this economy.

They had their chance. They failed. Just look around us. If corporate America won't deliver for its workers, it is time we step in and create a better system, centered on the dignity of work.

The American people have made it clear that they want a government that is on the side of workers. Eighty-one million voters gave Joe Biden a decisive victory of more than 7 million votes. That is a mandate for change.

In June, I laid out actions that corporations could take on their own, like raising base pay to \$15 an hour. Since they mostly refused, we should raise the Federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour.

Workers are still not safe on the job. So President Biden can immediately issue an OSHA, or Occupational Safety and Health Administration, emergency temporary standard forcing corporations to protect their workers.

Many companies still deny their employees paid sick leave, even during a pandemic. So we have to pass a national paid family leave plan.

Corporations are expanding rather than ending their exploitive "independent contractor" business model. So we are going to have to use the law to make them treat their workers as true employees. You know how they do it: Particularly large corporations will contract out custodial work, security work, and food service work in their company cafeteria, for instance. They contract it out to a private company that pays much less than the corporation pays, often wages barely above the minimum wage. Those workers should have to be treated like workers living under American labor law.

Corporations continue to coerce workers out of forming unions. So we need to pass the PRO Act—Protecting Our Right to Organize Act—to empower workers with a voice in their workplace.

The economy isn't physics. It is not governed by a scientific law outside our control. It is made up of people making choices about our values and in what kind of society we want to live.

That is the reason we have an Occupational Safety and Health Administration. It is why we have these agencies: to make sure that workers are treated fairly to begin with.

We have the power to change how the economy works so that it rewards work instead of greed. We can create more jobs at middle-class wages. We can give people power over their lives and schedules. We can expand economic security and opportunity for everyone.

Americans voted for this change. Americans aren't going to wait for corporations to reform themselves on their own. That is for sure. They never have. They never will. It is up to the rest of us to deliver for the people whom we serve and create a country where all work has dignity.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### TRIBUTE TO CORY GARDNER

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, it is my pleasure to honor my good friend and my colleague Senator CORY GARDNER. CORY and I were friends in the House of Representatives. Our friendship deepened in the Senate, especially after he took the reins as chair and I as the ranking member of the Subcommittee on East Asia of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in the 115th Congress.

We were unlikely partners in a lot of ways. He is a conservative Republican and I am a liberal Democrat. I know that Tom Brady is the best quarterback ever. He just might say that it is John Elway.

But like me, CORY is a pragmatist, and we did find common ground. In fact, we were a two-man legislative wrecking crew, with several credits to our names.

GARDNER-MARKEY collaborated on such hits as the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act, ARIA, sweeping Asia-focused legislation to reorient our Indo-Pacific strategy around alliances, common values, and mutual security; the Cambodia Democracy Act, to stand up for civil society the rights of a political opposition; the Taiwan International Participation Act of 2018, to signal both our commitment to the island nation and our displeasure with China's efforts to shut it out of international organizations; and the Leverage to Enhance Effective Diplomacy Act, to build the conditions for a future North Korea that no longer threatens its neighbors and the world with nuclear weapons.

With CORY as chair and myself as ranking member, we convened hearings, drafted broad legislation, hosted